

A  
DISCOURSE  
UPON *843. 9*  
*Wandering Thoughts*<sup>3</sup>  
IN  
PRAYER,  
Shewing the  
CAUSES  
AND  
REMEDIES thereof.

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psal. vi. 2. *Have Mercy upon me, O  
LORD, for I am weak.*

2 Cor. xii. 9. *My Grace is sufficient  
for thee: for my Strength is made  
perfect in Weakness.*

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By ABRA. MACKBETH, E. A. P.

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A  
DISCOURSE  
OF  
*Wandering Thoughts*  
IN  
PRAYER.

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*The Introduction.*

THE Prophet *Isaiah*, who,  
for his clear Predictions  
concerning the *Gospel*, is  
properly and worthily  
called the *Evangelical Prophet*, speak-  
eth thus in his *XLth* Chapter, and  
A 2 the

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the First and Second Verses, Comfort ye, comfort ye my People, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, &c. Where he foretelleth the Coming of the true Messiah, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose Person he saith in the LXIst Chapter, and the First, Second, and Third Verses; The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good Tidings unto the Meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim Liberty to the Captives, and the opening of the Prison to them that are bound: To proclaim the acceptable Year of the LORD, and the Day of Vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn: To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them Beauty for Ashes, the Oil of Joy for Mourning, the Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness; that they might be called Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

This



This Prophecy was expressly applied by our Saviour to himself in St. Luke IV. 21. So that we may be assured he came not only to provide for our everlasting Happiness in the other World, but also to comfort us in this. And every true and faithful Minister of his Word, can very truly say with St. Paul and Timothy, in 2 Cor. I. 3, 4, 5. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercies, and the God of all Comfort; who comforteth us in all our Tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any Trouble, by the Comfort wherewith we our selves are comforted of God. For if the Sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our Consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

But since there is no heavier Burden, nor greater Cause of Complaint, to sincere Christians, who truly love God, and desire faithfully and acceptably to serve and worship him, than wandring Thoughts in Prayer; for that is a spiritual Load (more grievous and more difficult to bear than any temporal Affliction), ma-

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ny times pressing down their devout Souls almost into the very Abyfs of Despair: Therefore I could not but conclude, that a short, plain, and practical *Discourse* upon that great and important Subject, might be useful and acceptable to such humble and well-disposed Persons, as should be pleased to bestow some Time upon the reading and considering of this present Composure; while perhaps they have no other, and till, through the Direction of divine Providence, they obtain a better Help in this Case. Which we may hope to see, when some more experienced and more skilful Guide of Souls, or some faithful Servant and Disciple of our Lord and Saviour, who hath made greater Proficiency in his heavenly School, than I have done, shall communicate his better digested and more pious Thoughts upon this Subject; as such an one may easily do with divine Assistance, and I heartily wish it may be done for the Publick Good.

In

In the mean Time I shall, according to the Measure of Grace and Understanding bestowed upon me by the *Father of Lights*, endeavour to shew, in Three several Chapters, *First*, What *Prayer* is. *Secondly*, What are the true *Causes* of *Wandering Thoughts* in *Prayer*. And, *Thirdly*, what *Remedies* are proper to be used and applied against this Distemper of our Souls.

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## C H A P. I.

*The Nature and Advantages of*  
P R A Y E R.

§. I. **P**RAYER is the Address of pious Souls to Heaven, and their Conversation with God. It is a divine Exercise, whereof an unconverted Sinner is incapable, and which can be rightly performed by none but a regenerate Person. For it is not a Work of Nature, but of Grace; being wrought and produced in our Souls by the Spirit of Christ: insomuch that they who are not endued with the Spirit of Christ, do not really pray at all; and therefore an unconverted Sinner being void of that Divine Spirit, and having no real Intention to worship God, cannot perform this great and excellent Duty of Prayer.

But perhaps you will say, *How then shall any Person be ever converted, since that cannot be effected without Prayer?*

I an-

I answer, it is very true; that no Person is converted without Prayer; neither yet can any one pray without Assistance of the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Grace, and of Supplications, Zech. XII. 10. *helpeth our Infirmities, maketh Intercession for the Saints*, (i. e. for all true Christians) according to the Will of God, Rom. VIII. 26, 27. and being the Spirit of Faith, 2 Cor. IV. 13. enableth us to call God *Father*, Rom. VIII. 15. and without his Aid no one can devoutly repeat the *Lord's-Prayer*, which beginneth with these Words: *Our Father, which art in Heaven*. But the Spirit of God is always ready to assist poor Sinners in their Repentance; nay, he is continually *striving* with them in order to their Conversion; till some perhaps are so hardened in Sin by their own Obstinacy and Malice, that the continued Offers of Grace being still despised and rejected by them, would but rise in Judgment against them, and aggravate their Condemnation at the Day of Judgment. Such Persons may therefore



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at length become Reprobate, being quite forsaken of God, and left to themselves and other Enemies of their Salvation. Yet I firmly believe, this very seldom cometh to pass, and the Grace of God is constantly offered to most Men as long as they live; and every thing in the whole Course of their Life, is so ordered and directed by Divine Providence, as to promote their Conversion and Salvation; if it be not hindred by the obstinate Resistance of their own corrupt and sinful Hearts. So that even most of those that continue finally impenitent, are not reprobated before their natural Death.

And since the holy *Spirit* is always ready to stir up Mens Hearts to true *Repentance*, He is likewise ready and willing to stir them up to *Prayer*; which He very often doth by putting good Thoughts into them, whether they improve those good Motions, in order to their Conversion, or no. But whenever any one, being moved with good Thoughts by the *Holy Ghost* working inwardly upon his Heart,  
is



is thereby excited with Conviction of his Guilt and Misery, to *Prayer* and Repentance; obediently receiving the offered Grace, and faithfully improving it; he is enabled to *pray* sincerely and acceptably to God, by the powerful Assistance of the *Holy Ghost*, who is the first Mover and Cause of all our *Prayers*, and without whose Help we should never be able to *pray* at all.

§. II. This Divine Exercise of *Prayer*, is either *Oral* or *Mental*. *Oral Prayer*, is outwardly expressed by Words; *Mental Prayer*, is only conceived and formed in the Heart, and there expressed inwardly either by devout and holy Thoughts, or else by spiritual *Sighs* and *Groans*, Rom. VIII. 26.

*Oral Prayer*, is either *Publick* or *Private*.

*Publick Prayer*, is performed with the Congregation at Church.

*Private Prayer* is twofold, being performed either with the Family, and therefore called *Family-Prayer*; or alone by one's self, which may be called *Secret Prayer*, or *praying in secret*, Matth. VI. 6.

*Mental*

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*Mental Prayer* may be practised in all Places, and upon all Occasions. For it consisteth principally in a religious Disposition or Habit of Mind, whereby we are ready to lift up our Hearts to God, with pious *Ejaculations* and devout Petitions at all Times. And by doing this, and *praying* more solemnly whenever we have an Opportunity for it, we literally fulfill that most profitable Injunction of *St. Paul*, in *1 Thess. V. 17. Pray without ceasing.*

§. III. But none of these Kinds of *Prayer* will be accepted of God, or contribute any thing to our real Happiness, unless it proceed from a solid Principle of *Divine Life*, planted in our Souls by the *Spirit of Christ* (as hath been hinted already); neither will it avail any thing, if it be not accompanied with a truly pious Course of Life, and with devout *Attention* and awful Reverence, besides an humble and faithful Dependence upon the Infinite Merits of *Christ*, for whose Sake, and through whose Intercession alone, all our *Prayers* are heard.

And

And that what I have here said is unquestionably true, plainly appears from *John IV. 24. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.*

§. IV. Whoever prayeth aright, will be sure to receive many and great *Advantages* from thence.

And 1. Thus we shall maintain and enjoy constant *Communion* with the most holy and undivided Trinity, with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

2. We shall obtain all *good* things, both spiritual and temporal, which are necessary or expedient for us.

3. We shall enjoy the *Divine Protection* at all Times.

4. We may have Recourse to infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness, to *help* us in Time of Temptation, Necessity, and Distress.

5. We shall make a happy *Progress* towards the Kingdom of eternal Glory, and shall be still growing in Grace.

6. We may obtain many spiritual and temporal Blessings for our *Friends*, and for the *Church of Christ*,

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Christ, and in some Measure promote the Conversion of *Unbelievers*, and the Salvation of *Mankind* in general.

7. Thus all things will certainly *work together for our Good*, Rom VIII. 28.

8. And so we may come at length to enjoy a great deal of *Comfort*, *Satisfaction*, and *Delight*, even while we are engaged in this our *Christian Warfare*; unless God shall see fit to order it otherwise, for his greater *Glory*, and our greater *Good*.

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## C H A P. II.

*Causes of Wandring Thoughts in*  
PRAYER.

§. I. **A**S the Advantages of Prayer are very great, so the Performance thereof is attended with *Difficulties* and *Discouragements*; notwithstanding which it is highly necessary to perform this great and excellent Duty, in the best and most perfect Manner that ever we can. And it will be infinitely worth our while, with divine Aid, to break through and surmount those *Difficulties* and *Discouragements*; whereof I shall now mention but one, as being perhaps the principal and most extensive, as well as most troublesome and grievous, most dangerous and hurtful of all that can assault us, and hinder the Effect of our Prayers. And that is *Wandring Thoughts*. For I speak here only of sincere and faithful Christians, not of them that



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that live in wilful Sin, not being yet converted from their evil course of Life, whose very *Prayers* are an *Abomination* to God, *Prov. XXVIII. 9.* So that whenever they pretend to *pray*, their *presumptuous* Impiety hinders them from *praying* acceptably at all. And this indeed is a greater Hindrance of *Prayer*, than that I have mentioned above. But I never knew any such Persons really troubled at *Wandring Thoughts*, or complain of them in earnest, as of a heavy Burthen, and a Grief to their Souls ; tho' without doubt all their *Thoughts wander* after other Objects, while they pretend, and perhaps imagine, that they are *praying* to God ; which will be charged upon them at last, by the terrible just Judgment of God, as downright Hypocrisie, and *taking* his holy *Name in vain*. I am not now directing my Discourse to them (altho' I heartily pray for their Conversion), but I am endeavouring to advise and comfort *sincere Christians*, who are grieved and dis-



discouraged by nothing more, than by *Wandering Thoughts* in Prayer.

And for their Sake I shall now endeavour to shew the *Causes* of that spiritual Disease, in this Chapter, and proper *Remedies* for it in the next.

The First *Cause* of *Wandering Thoughts* in Prayer, is the greatest and the worst of them all, and the *Cause* of all the rest; even our *Natural Corruption* or *Original Sin*. From this all *actual Sins*, whether of Commission or of Omission; from this all evil and sinful Thoughts, Words, and Actions, certainly proceed. And as the *Corruption* of our *Nature* appeareth in nothing more, than in taking our Affections off from God, to place them upon his Creatures; so by our *Thoughts* *wandering* in Time of Prayer from God, who ought then to be their only Object, and running after innumerable other Objects, with which they have nothing to do at present, we may plainly discover, that even after our Conversion, *Original Sin*, remaineth in us, though it doth  
not.

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not reign over us, according to 1 John I. 8. *If we say that we have no Sin, (i. e. no Original Sin) we deceive our selves, and the Truth is not in us.*

§. II. The next Cause that I shall here assign to *Wandring Thoughts* in Prayer, is some *evil Habit* of Mind not yet sufficiently mortified by true and hearty Repentance. And all *evil Habits* may be reduced to one of these Three, mentioned by St. John in his First Epistle, Chapter II. Ver. 16. *All that is in the World, the Lust of the Flesh, and the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father, but is of the World.* Here we see, that 1<sup>st</sup>, *the Lust of the Flesh*, or the Love of carnal Pleasure; 2<sup>dly</sup>, *The Lust of the Eye*, or Covetousness and Desire of worldly Riches; and 3<sup>dly</sup>, *The Pride of Life*, or Ambition and the Pursuit of worldly Honour and Glory, are Principles quite contrary to the Fear and Love of God, which ought to possess our Hearts while we are praying to him. *They are not of the Father, not of God, but of the World,*  
proceeding

proceeding from a worldly Frame and Disposition of Mind, which, as we may justly infer from the 15<sup>th</sup> Verse of this Chapter, is inconsistent with true Piety; for there the Apostle saith expressely, that *if any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him*: and certainly he that is void of the Love of God, is void of true Piety and Christianity, whatever good Opinion he may have of himself. And altho' no sincere Christian is wholly influenced by any of those Three evil Principles, or subject to the Dominion of those sinful *Habits*; yet so long as Original Sin remaineth in us, which I suppose to be as long as we live in this World, we shall be troubled more or less with divers Temptations, inclining us to gratifie those worldly and sinful *Lusts*. And altho sincere Christians do not use to yield willingly to such Temptations, and so to commit wilful and presumptuous Sin; yet they will without doubt be continually sollicitated by their spiritual Enemies, to set their Affections up-  
on

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on unlawful Objects. And I believe, that *sinful Thoughts* and worldly *Lusts* never stir more in our Hearts, nor give us more Disturbance, than in the Time of *Prayer*; because of their great Enmity to the Worship of God, whereof *Prayer* is an essential Part.

And if we afterwards seriously reflect upon the *Wandring Thoughts* that have interrupted our Devotion, we shall assuredly perceive, that so many of them as we can remember, had respect to one or more of those evil *Lusts*. And we shall find, that we are most easily disturbed by those *Lusts* that are most suitable to the natural Constitution of our Bodies, and Inclination of our Minds.

§. III. Our *Thoughts* will be apt to *wander* in Time of *Prayer*, when our *Devotion* flags, and our *Love* to God grows cold, which is too frequently the Case of most, or of all Christians, more or less. And this produceth Dulness and Heaviness of Spirit, cloggeth the Wings of our Devotion, and abateth the Fervency of our *Prayers*. By which Means,  
the

the Delight which we should take in approaching the most perfect Good, and the most amiable of all Beings, is greatly diminished, or perhaps quite abolished. And then no Wonder, if, finding no Delight and Satisfaction in the Performance of this Duty, we perform it heavily and without any Vigour and earnest Application of Mind. So our Attention languisheth, and *Wandering Thoughts* very easily insinuate themselves into our cold and unaffected Hearts.

§. IV. Many times even they that are truly pious, become, through divers Temptations, too *negligent* of their Salvation, having too little Desire of, and Regard to, the eternal Happiness of Heaven, and those Means of Grace, and Gifts of the Spirit, which are necessary to fit and qualify them for the Enjoyment thereof. And this *Carelessness* very naturally and certainly produceth a kind of Indifference, whether they obtain such spiritual and heavenly Benefits or no. Then, as most of our *Petitions* and *Thanksgivings*



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*ings* are offered to God with immediate Respect to ſpiritual Benefits; and all the reſt are finally directed to the ſame End: ſo the Earneſtneſs of our Devotion, and the Cloſeneſs of our Attention, will be abated, in Proportion to the ſmall Value we at that time ſet upon thoſe ſublime but deſpiſed Objects. And thus Way is made for any ſort of *Wandring Thoughts*.

§. V. *Weakneſs of Faith*, or want of exerciſing that excellent and neceſſary Grace, likewise too frequently maketh Room in our Hearts for *Wandring Thoughts* in Prayer. Concerning this great Evil St. James ſpeaketh thus in Chapter I. Ver. 5, 6, 7, 8. *If any of you lack Wiſdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it ſhall be given him. But let him ask in Faith, nothing wavering: For he that wavereth, is like a Wave of the Sea, driven with the Wind, and tossed. For let not that Man think that he ſhall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded Man is unſtable in all his Ways.*

Now



Now when our *Faith* thus faileth, we do not see the Advantage arising from our *Prayers*, because we are not then excited to a lively and encouraging Hope and Prospect of obtaining what we ask. And by consequence, the Fervour of our Devotion is very much allayed, our Minds are greatly discouraged, and easily diverted to other Objects; as Men commonly are slow and heartless at their Work, when they imagine that they labour in vain.

§. VI. Farther, some great *Danger*, heavy *Affliction*, or *Trouble* of *Mind*, is apt to disturb our Devotion, by crowding very many sorrowful and anxious *Thoughts* into our dejected Hearts. For it is very difficult (if possible) to lay aside all Reflexion upon our present Grief, which so nearly concerneth us; and to give up our selves to *Prayer* without Distraction, altho' indeed that doth still more nearly concern us. And we are hurried away with some sort of Violence, to a sorrowful Remembrance of our Danger and Distress, and very apt, through

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through our great Frailty, even in the Time of *Prayer*, to consider of Ways and Means to escape the *Danger*, or to get free from the *Trouble*, wherewith we are now oppressed.

§. VII. Again, many sincere Christians and well-disposed Persons are, by the most wise and merciful Direction of divine Providence, subject to some bodily Distemper, which is of such a Nature, that by affecting the Head, it unavoidably scattereth their *Thoughts*, and hindreth their more devout Attention to *Prayer* and the Worship of God. So that they are at such Times as that Distemper prevaieth, constantly exposed to numberless strange Conceits, and confused *Wandring Thoughts*, upon great Variety of Objects, and of things either spiritual or temporal, that have for the most part little or no Relation to the Subject of their Devotions, about which their Minds should be employed at present. But this *Cause* differeth widely from *those* that have been mentioned before,

fore in this Respect, that our Will is something concerned in *them*, but not at all in *this*. A true Christian indeed seldom (if ever) giveth a full Consent to the *Wandering* of his *Thoughts* in time of *Prayer*; but if we consider the foregoing *Causes*, we shall find there some Degree of Compliance at least. Whereas here is nothing voluntary to be discerned, and all the Rovings of the Imagination are purely involuntary, and utterly abhorred by him or her that is troubled therewith.

And it is a Consideration of very great Weight and Importance, that such a Person is troubled with the like unaccountable and *Wandering Thoughts*, when employed about any thing else, which is never so agreeable to his or her own Inclinations and Will.

§. VIII. All other *Causes* of *Wandering Thoughts* in *Prayer* are put in Motion, are heightened and increased, by the subtle and malicious *Temptations* of that great and irreconcilable Enemy of God and our  

B
Souls,

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Souls, *the Devil*, who watcheth all Opportunities to disturb our *Devotion*, and hinder the effectual Performance of our Duty in attending the Worship and Service of God. And I make no Question, but he likewise sometimes shooteth his *fiery Darts* into our Minds, and perplexeth us more immediately with very impious and horrid *evil Thoughts*, even when we are addressing ourselves in *Prayer* to God, who permitteth the Tempter thus to *sift us like Wheat*, that we may be truly humbled under a just Sense of our Weakness and Corruption; and God may be glorified by getting the Victory over his Enemy and ours, overthrowing all his Force, and pulling down his *strong Holds*, casting down *Imaginations*, and every high thing, that exalteth it self against the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. X. 4, 5. Which Wonders God worketh in us by the mighty Power of his heavenly Grace.

CHAP.

## C H A P. III.

Remedies against Wandering Thoughts  
in Prayer.

§. I. **F**IRST, Since we are not able to think, speak, or do any the least spiritual good thing by our own natural Power, and without the Assistance of divine Grace; we must, above all things, *pray* often, and as fervently as we are able, for the Aid of God's holy Spirit, that we may so be enabled to worship him with Sincerity, Reverence and Attention, according to his Will. And they that are not provided with some better Help, may frequently repeat the following Form.

**O** Almighty and most merciful God, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! take Pity upon me, a miserable Sinner; and reject me not for my great Unworthiness. Thou knowest, Lord, the Sorrows of my Heart. Thou knowest how heartily I am grieved for my great Corruption and my innumerable Sins. O give me

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Grace



‘ Grace continually to mortifie the  
‘ Body of Sin, and heartily to re-  
‘ pent of all my evil Thoughts,  
‘ Words, and Actions ; whereby I  
‘ have at any Time offended thy  
‘ supreme Majesty. Enable me ut-  
‘ terly to detest, renounce and for-  
‘ sake all sinful Customs and Habits,  
‘ the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the  
‘ Eye, and the Pride of Life ; and to  
‘ turn immediately to Thee with all  
‘ my Heart. Help me to take my Af-  
‘ fections off from all things here be-  
‘ low, that I may set them upon  
‘ things above, where Christ sitteth  
‘ at the right Hand of God. Grant  
‘ that I may love Thee above all  
‘ things, and thy Creatures only in  
‘ Subordination to Thee and for thy  
‘ Sake. Enable me to taste and see  
‘ how good and gracious Thou art ;  
‘ and strengthen my Faith, that I  
‘ may therewith behold such Ob-  
‘ jects as are otherwise invisible, the  
‘ Excellency of thy glorious King-  
‘ dom, and the Beauty of Holiness ;  
‘ and that I may steadfastly believe  
‘ thy Promises, and cheerfully de-  
‘ pend upon the infinite Merits of  
‘ our



' our Redeemer Christ Jesus. Make  
 ' me to be truly resigned to thy bless-  
 ' ed Will in all things, and patient-  
 ' ly and contentedly to bear any  
 ' either outward or inward Cross,  
 ' which Thou art pleas'd to lay up-  
 ' on me at any Time. Strengthen  
 ' me to resist the Devil, that he may  
 ' flee from me. And since I know  
 ' and confess my own Weakness,  
 ' and the great Imperfection of my  
 ' best Performances in thy Service,  
 ' let thy good Spirit help my Infirmi-  
 ' ties; and be Thou pleased gracious-  
 ' ly to encourage me in using my  
 ' utmost Endeavours, to worship  
 ' Thee still with more steady Atten-  
 ' tion and more fervent Zeal. And  
 ' then finally, notwithstanding my  
 ' many Failings & wandring Thoughts,  
 ' O give me Leave, and give me  
 ' Power, humbly to rely upon thy in-  
 ' finite Goodness for Acceptance of  
 ' my imperfect Devotions, for the  
 ' Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; to  
 ' whom with Thee and the Holy  
 ' Ghost, be all Honour and Glory,  
 ' World without End. *Amen.*

§. II. *Secondly*, We must have a

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particular Regard to the *Causes* of our *Wandring Thoughts*, and endeavour to find out and apply suitable *Remedies* to them.

And 1. During the whole Course of our Life, we must heartily endeavour to subdue and root out the *Corruption* of our *Nature*, and to conquer the nearest and most dangerous Enemy of our Salvation, which is *Original Sin*; according to that Passage in *Eph. IV. 22, 23, 24. That ye put off concerning the former Conversation the old Man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful Lusts: And be renewed in the Spirit of your Mind; and that ye put on the new Man; which after God is created in Righteousness and true Holiness.* And as in *Col. III. 9. St. Paul* thus exhorteth them and us: *Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old Man with his Deeds, and have put on the new Man, which is renewed in Knowledge after the Image of him that created him: It is manifest, that by true and hearty Repentance, and by continual Renovation after the divine Image, which was before miserably defaced, nay, destroyed in us by Original Sin, we are to mortifie that our natural Corruption*

ruption more and more ; so that it may not reign over us now, as it did before our Conversion to God. And if we do this as we ought, if we faithfully and courageously maintain our Ground in the spiritual Warfare, taking part with the *Spirit* against the *Flesh*, we shall make continual Progress in Christian Piety, putting off not only the *old Man*, that is, *Original Sin*, but also *his Deeds*, that is, our *actual Sins*, which (as I have observed before) proceed from that, and therefore they will of course be mortified together with it. And whoever maketh the Experiment, will find, to his great Comfort, that the more his *natural Corruption* is mortified, the less he will be perplexed with *Wandering Thoughts* in *Prayer*. For this is one of the accursed *Branches* growing up from that bitter *Root* ; this is one of the *Deeds* of the *Old Man*, which either flourisheth or decayeth along with its *Root*, with the *Cause* from whence it proceedeth.

However, it may please God sometimes to permit the most sincere and the most experienced Christians, to be troubled with *Wandering Thoughts*,

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arising from the Two last *Causes* mentioned in the foregoing Chapter. But that will ever tend to their greater Purification and Happiness, if they behave themselves as they ought to do under it: To which End I shall offer my poor Advice, when I come to propose *Remedies* against those *Causes* in their Order and Place.

2. As for any *sinful Custom* or *evil Habit* of *Mind*, from whence our *Wandring Thoughts* proceed, that must be carefully discover'd by impartial Examination of our own Heart and Life. And when it is found out, it must be continually mortified and destroyed by daily and hourly Acts of *Repentance*. I say hourly as well as daily, because we may be hourly tempted to commit the Sin, or at least to entertain the *Thoughts* of it with Delight. And then we must immediately pray and strive against it, and continue praying and striving against it, till through divine Grace we have got the Victory, and are delivered from the Temptation for that Time.

And farther, we must be so watchful, that it may not prevail over us  
be-

before we are aware of it, but we may immediately discern it, and contend with it, striving, with the Help of God, to check its very first Motions, and prevent its gaining any Advantage over us. But if we be so employed, that we cannot retire to pray when it cometh upon us, we must perform that by *mental Prayer*, and hearty inward *Ejaculations* to Heaven, which we have not Opportunity to do by *Oral Prayer*, in such an Exigency as that. And if we are but faithful to God and our own Souls, he will certainly supply us with *Grace to help in time of Need*, Heb. IV. 16.

If you are tempted to the abominable Sin of *Uncleanness*, it will be proper to observe this particular Rule. The safest and surest Way is, immediately to divert your Mind from such *Thoughts*, to some good Object, especially to God himself; earnestly endeavouring to forget the Temptation, and to go on resolutely in the Performance of your Duty, as soon as possibly you can. For such *impure Thoughts* are very apt to gain Ground of any one that will stand to



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dispute with them, and argue against the Sin, while he lieth under Temptation to it. Wherefore we must flee to God for Help; and strive with divine Aid to blot the impure Image immediately out of our Mind and Remembrance.

When we are assaulted with Temptations in the Time of divine Worship at Church, it may be of Use to observe the Methods recommended in the Third Section following.

3. In order to quicken and raise our *Devotion*, and to increase our *Love* to God, we must frequently *meditate* upon his supreme Excellency and Loveliness, and the immense Greatness of his *Love* to us. We must humbly and earnestly beseech him to *shed abroad his Love in our Hearts, by the Holy Ghost*, Rom. V. 5. And we must continually exercise our selves in bringing forth the true and genuine *Fruits of divine Love, the Fruits of the Spirit*, Gal. V. 22, 23. Eph. V. 9. We must make it appear that we *love God*, by *keeping his Commandments*, John XIV. 15. We must *love God with all our Hearts, and all our Minds, with all our Souls, and all our Strength; and our Neigh-*

*Neighbour as our selves*, Matth. XXII. 37. Mark XII. 30, &c. Luke X. 27. And we must earnestly endeavour to attain such a Frame and Habit of Mind, as to have God always before us, and act from a Principle of true *Love* to him, and seek his Glory in every thing we undertake.

4. To excite our selves to a very *earnest Desire* of *Salvation*, and a *high Esteem* of the glorious Kingdom of *Heaven*, and of those several *Means* of *Grace*, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, or Christian Virtues, which are necessary to qualifie us for the Enjoyment thereof, we ought frequently to consider of such Arguments as these. That our Souls are immortal, and must as certainly enjoy *eternal Life*, or else suffer *everlasting Death*, after we depart out of this World, as we now live and converse in it. That the *Joys* of *Heaven* exceed all humane Comprehension. So that the Saints and Martyrs have voluntarily and cheerfully parted with all their worldly Goods, and even with their natural Life it self, in Imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for his Sake, that they might glorifie God, and rejoice  
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for ever with him in *Heaven*, according to 1 Cor. II. 9. *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,* 2 Cor. IV. 18. *We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,* Heb. XI. XII. 1, 2, 3. We ought to meditate on these and other Passages of holy Writ, setting forth the superlative *Excellency* of that *Happiness* which our Lord and Saviour hath purchased for us with his Blood; and to beseech our heavenly Father to give us the manifold and inestimable *Graces* of his holy *Spirit*, together with a truly Christian and heavenly Disposition of Mind. And we shall find, by happy Experience, that the more we despise this World, and lay up our *Treasure in Heaven*, the more earnest and attentive we shall be in our *Devotions*, and the less troubled with *Wandring Thoughts* in Prayer.

5. With Respect to *Faith*, it is absolutely necessary to have our Souls endued with that divine Quality, before we can be properly called Christians.

Christians. Wherefore I conclude that every converted Person hath at least a Grain of true *Faith*, and a Spark of Celestial Light and Spiritual Life in his Heart. And this divine Principle must be continually improved, by rightly using those Three great Means of Proficiency in the Christian Religion, *Prayer, Meditation, and Temptation*; and by often duly receiving the *Supper* of our *Lord*. Let us imitate the Example of the Apostles, in praying to our Saviour to *increase our Faith*, Luke XVII. 5. And let us search out those several Texts of Scripture, wherein God hath promised to hear our *Prayers*; and attentively meditate upon them, and beseech God to write them in our Hearts. And let us often consider of the great Excellency of *Prayer*, and the innumerable and unvaluable Advantages that arise from the hearty and devout Performance of it.

But we must likewise be careful to exercise that Degree of *Faith* we have already obtained, in the Time of *Prayer*. We must then firmly and steadily believe, that *if we ask any thing according to the Will of God, he heareth us*.  
And

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*And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the Petitions that we desire of him, 1 John V. 14, 15. I can truly affirm, upon my own certain Experience, with hearty Thanks to God for his undeserved Grace; that many times when either in publick or private Prayer, I have met with some Expression which hath eminently quickned and excited my Faith, that hath immediately raised my Devotion, increased my Attention, and dispelled my Wandring Thoughts. And I am fully perswaded, that the more our Faith increaseth, and the more we exercise it in the Time of Prayer; the more we shall conquer and lay aside those Impediments.*

6. When we are exposed to any great *Danger*, we must pray heartily for a competent Measure of *Faith*, to enable us firmly to depend upon the Almighty Protection of our heavenly Father; we must often *meditate* upon the many Promises contained in the holy *Scripture*, relating to that Subject; we must endeavour, with divine Aid, to apply them effectually to our selves in our present dangerous Circumstances, and to cast all our Care upon God,

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*who careth for us*, 1 Pet. V. 7. We must also use Christian Prudence and great Circumspection, together with all such proper *Means* as he is pleased to put in our Power, to prevent the Calamity that threateneth us; and then we must leave the Event intirely to him, who will certainly bring *all things* to a good Issue, and cause them to *work together for our Good*, Rom. VIII. 28.

If we labour under any *Affliction*, either spiritual or *temporal*, we must very earnestly pray and strive for humble Resignation to the most blessed Will of God, and for Sanctification of our Troubles and Trials to the Glory of his great Name, and the promoting of our Salvation, and to the Good of his Church. We must not be cast down, but put our whole Trust in God, labouring faithfully to answer the gracious and beneficial Ends, for which his Fatherly Love hath laid the Affliction upon us. We must carefully observe the Instructions given us in *Heb. XII.* and many other Places of holy Writ. We must remember and practise what *St. Peter* saith in his first Epistle, the *Vth* Chapter and *6th* Verse, *Humble your selves therefore under the mighty*

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mighty Hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. And St. Paul in 2 Cor. IV. 17, 18. For our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

7. When by the Judgment of your Physician, or your own certain Observation, or both, you are apprised that your Head is affected with such a Distemper, as necessarily and unavoidably exposeth you to roving Imaginations, fond troublesome Conceits, and strong jealousies and Fears, all which have no Foundation in the Truth, but are utterly absurd, groundless, and false; then you must not be dejected and disheartened, as if all those prodigious Fancies, and monstrous Products of your Disease, would be charged upon you as so many wilful Sins. No, you may be assured of the contrary, so long as you are displeased at those false and foolish Notions, and at your *Wandring Thoughts* in the time of Prayer and of divine Worship, either publick

lick or private, and would gladly be freed from them, if you could. For that will be a Sign that (as hath been already observed in Chap. II. §. 7.) your Will is not here concerned. Which will farther appear from hence; that you are likewise troubled with such Thoughts at other times, when you are employed about such things as are very agreeable to your own Will (as hath been likewise hinted above); and therefore you would not be interrupted when you are so employed, if it were in your Power and Choice to prevent it. Neither would you be disturbed thus in your *Devotions*, if you could possibly avoid it. For that is the Mind of all true and sincere Christians, for whose Sake only this Discourse was drawn up. And in this Case, you ought not to think that our infinitely good God will censure your *Wandering Thoughts* with the dreadful Severity of an offended Judge; but that he will behold you under your great and heavy Affliction, with the tender Pity and Compassion of a loving Father. So that if you heartily endeavour to bear your Trial with Patience, and with Submission to his

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Infinite Wisdom and Fatherly Providence; and use such proper *Remedies*, both spiritual and natural, as you can obtain; this very Calamity, which is now so dreadful to you, will, in God's appointed time, produce very good and wholesome Effects. It will help you to set a greater Value upon the Gifts and Graces of God's holy Spirit, and to *work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling, according to the Will of God.*

But here it must be farther observed, that if your *Thoughts* wander more when you are at your *Devotions* than at any other time, that is not presently a certain Sign, that you consent to it, and so make it an Act of your Will, and a wilful Sin. No, that proceedeth from the Conjunction of some of the *other Causes* with this, and especially of the First and the Last, that is, from the Conjunction of humane Frailty with diabolical Suggestions. Wherefore you would do well to observe the Advice given you in Number 1. of this Section, and to be given in Number 8. And since you are justly to be reckoned amongst afflicted Persons, you may be likewise referred to what hath been said in Number 6. And

And what if God shall see fit to let you struggle with this Difficulty, for your greater Good, as long as you live? Be assured, that your violent and tedious Conflict in this spiritual War, will bring forth the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness at last; and you will, by happy Experience, know the Truth of this Scripture, *Matth. V. 4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. And of this: Psal. CXXVI. 6. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious Seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his Sheaves with him.*

In short, dear Christian, you may rest satisfied, that the more Sorrow you endure in this Life, in Obedience to the most holy and blessed Will of God, the more Joy you will receive, through the Merits of Christ, in the glorious Kingdom of Heaven.

8. As to the Devil, we are plainly cautioned to watch against him, and resist him, in several Places of holy Writ. But nowhere more plainly, than in *1 Pet. V. 8. Be sober, be vigilant; because your Adversary the Devil, as a roaring Lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist stedfast in the Faith,*



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*Faith*, &c. I confess it is not easie always to discover the Attempts he maketh to draw and betray us into Sin: but since we are here told that he is so maliciously vigilant and industrious to ruin us to all Eternity, we can never be too piously vigilant and industrious to avoid, resist, and drive away his dangerous *Temptations*; which are innumerable, upon account of the vast Variety of Objects, represented by him to our Imagination, as so many Incentives to Evil. Let us therefore continually pray and labour for the Extirpation of his hellish Kingdom; and expecting him always to tempt us, let us be upon our Guard against every evil *Thought* that may at any time arise in our Hearts; and with the Help of divine Grace, as soon as ever we perceive it, immediately suppress and expell it. And especially we must beware of those most execrable and diabolical Vices, that would render us most like to him, and most subject to his tyrannical Power and Will: Such as *Lying, Malice, Envy, and Pride*.

And because he desireth nothing more than to root out and destroy our *Faith*, which is the Foundation of all other

other Virtues belonging to a Christian, we must be very careful to exercise, preserve and encrease it, according to the Directions given above in Number 5. For that is necessary in order to resist and overcome all his Temptations, and especially his most violent Assaults, even blasphemous and hellish *Thoughts*, which he many times casteth, like so many *fiery Darts*, into the Souls of Men. Concerning which, St. *Paul* giveth this most wise and charitable Advice in *Eph. VI. 11, 16.* *Put on the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil. Above all, taking the Shield of Faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery Darts of the Wicked.* Now whether he setteth upon us in this Manner when we are at our *Devotion*, or at any other Time, altho' we may be at first inclined to think it impossible to withstand him, and so may be ready to despair of Help and Comfort; yet let us but look up to God with an Eye of Faith, remembring his gracious Promises, and his infinite Goodness and Truth, together with the Relation we bear to him through Christ, and so recollect our scattered *Thoughts*;

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*Thoughts*; and we shall get the Victory, so far at least, that altho' our Enemy perhaps may still continue to trouble us, yet he shall not be able to accomplish the Hurt and Mischief he intended against us. Let us therefore remember what St. James saith in Chapter IV. Verse 7. *Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.* And St. Paul, in 1 Cor. XV. 57. *Thanks be to God, which giveth us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

§. III. Thirdly, When we are actually engaged in Prayer, or the Performance of any religious Duty, we must be very careful not to entertain *Wandring Thoughts* with Approbation and Delight; no, not tho' they should seem to be good and profitable, as being employed about some good and useful Subject. For they are altogether unseasonable at such a Time, proceeding frequently from the Tempter, the grand Enemy of our Souls, who so endeavoureth to disturb our *Devotion*, when perhaps he could effect that no other Way. Wherefore we must not take Pleasure in them, nor willingly suffer them to dwell upon our Minds. Neither should we wonder or be discouraged at any Difficulties that may attend the Performance of this great *Duty*, which is so excellent in its own Nature, and procurerh such vast Benefits to us; altho' so many Causes contribute to make it difficult, and to interrupt it with *Wandring Thoughts*. It is certainly worth our while to suffer any Hardship or Inconvenience, for the high Honour and Advantage of conversing with God, and enjoying Communion with Him. And we ought to remember, that we are *Christians*; that we are *Soldiers* of Christ, and must be al-

always fighting manfully under his Banner, against Sin, the World, and the Devil. And if we be *faithful unto the Death*, if we *persevere unto the End*, he will crown us with Victory, and will give us a *Crown of Life*, Rev. II. 10. And if we persevere with Patience, we may likewise hope by Degrees to obtain Spiritual Strength and Comfort, in this Life ; as the infinite Wisdom of God shall see most expedient for us. In the mean time, these Temptations and Difficulties are of great Use, to humble and purifie us, and to prepare us for the Enjoyment of greater Gifts here, and of higher Glory hereafter, as I have intimated already more than once ; but could not for all that forbear repeating and inculcating the same Observation in this Place. The All-wise Providence of God, and his heavenly Grace, will ever lead us in the safest and surest Way to Salvation, if we will but follow the infallible Conduct of his holy Spirit.

Therefore let us sincerely and resolutely endeavour to lay aside our *Wandering Thoughts*, immediately as soon as we perceive them to assault us. We must directly fix our Minds again upon what we are about, without staying to argue and dispute with them, or to consider their Guilt or evil Consequence. We must not then think of any thing concerning them, besides this, that we must and will immediately lay them aside. And this we must always endeavour to do, through the Assistance of divine Grace.

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§. IV. But afterwards, as we have Opportunity, we should very seriously reflect upon our *Wandring Thoughts* in Prayer, consider the Causes, and apply the Remedies that are most adapted to our several Circumstances, and to our particular Case. Above all, we must constantly and earnestly pray for daily *Renovation* and hearty *Devotion*. And we may be assured, that the Infinite Merits of Christ will make up all our Defects; and so long as we exert our utmost Endeavour, his and our heavenly Father will graciously accept of us for his Sake.

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